UNITED
NATIONS

CRC

Convention on the
Rights of the Child

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/SR.672
15 January 2001

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Twenty-sixth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 672nd MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 9 January 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. OUEDRAOGO

CONTENTS

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (continued)

Initial report of Latvia (continued)

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Official Records Editing Section, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

GE.01-40127 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Latvia (continued) (CRC/C/11/Add.22; CRC/C/Q/LAT/1; written replies of the Government of Latvia to the questions in the list of issues (document without a symbol distributed in the meeting room in English only))

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Latvia took places at the Committee table.

2. Mr. KĀRKLIŅŠ (Latvia), replying to Committee members' questions concerning citizenship and naturalization, said that Latvia's legislation on citizenship took account of the recommendations of various international human rights bodies, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), all of which had acknowledged that it conformed to democratic and human rights standards.

3. The law effectively re-established Latvian citizenship for all those who had had Latvian nationality in 1940, the year the Soviet occupation had begun, and their descendants. During the Soviet period, many people had been brought into Latvia: indeed, by 1990, Latvians had been virtually a minority in their own country. However, the Latvian Government had no intention of asking those people to leave the country, considering them victims of Soviet policies. The approach adopted was rather one of integrating them into Latvian society by naturalization - an enormous undertaking, unique in its scale.

4. Currently some 568,000 people were under Latvian law, not Latvian citizens. However, they were not stateless persons but had the specific status of "Latvian non-citizens". Under Latvian constitutional law, they enjoyed the same economic, social, political and cultural rights as Latvian citizens, except that they could not vote or stand for elected office. At the same time, they had none of the obligations of Latvian citizens, including that of military service. Unlike stateless persons, they enjoyed the full protection of the State.

5. The main aim was to encourage non-citizens to apply for naturalization. Under the legal framework for naturalization, applicants must be able to speak Latvian, know something of Latvian history and the national anthem, and must sign a declaration of loyalty. The language and history examinations had been revised several times in cooperation with Council of Europe experts and well over 90 per cent of candidates passed the first time. As of 8 January 2001, 41,700 applications had been submitted, of which some 6,000 were from minors, and 38,800 had been approved, including more than 5,000 from minors.

6. Arguably, the numbers of non-citizens were rather high, but the intention was not to enforce naturalization. The hope was that non-citizens would decide for themselves to become fully-fledged members of society. The number of applications was increasing, having risen from 4,500 in 1998 to just under 16,000 in 2000.

7. In answer to Ms. Karp's question on passports and the right to freedom of movement, he said that the Ministry of the Interior's Passport Centre worked three shifts in order to provide passports to all who applied. Both citizens' and non-citizens' passports were recognized by all States throughout the world; the only difference was that some States admitted Latvian citizens without a visa, but not Latvian non-citizens. Latvia had tried unsuccessfully to convince those States to admit all its residents on the same basis.

8. The problem of discrimination referred to might have been related to the exchange of former Soviet Union passports. Some 20,000 people had failed to exchange their Soviet Union passport for Latvian papers by the deadline set by the Government. The Government had twice extended the deadline. If any had subsequently failed to exchange their documents, that could not be blamed on discrimination by the Government.

9. The Government was aware that the heading "nationality" or "ethnicity" in passports could be considered discriminatory. A new citizens' passport was currently in preparation, and a final decision had yet to be taken on whether to continue to include that heading.

10. With regard to the Citizenship Law's provisions for children, all children born in Latvia after 21 August 1991 were granted Latvian citizenship at their parents' request, or at their own request if they were over 15. To date, 531 children had been granted citizenship under that provision.

11. In reply to Mr. Fulci's question regarding the decision-making process, he said that there were two kinds of regulations: those issued by the Cabinet of Ministers, which were generally fully binding, including on municipalities; and those issued by individual ministries, which were binding on those State institutions for which each ministry was specifically responsible, but which for other institutions had the status of recommendations.

12. With regard to statistical data, he said that Latvia was developing its statistical system in accordance with European Union standards. By 2003 it would be fully compatible with the European Union system.

13. Ms. IELĪTE (Latvia) said that, under the Law on Protection of the Rights of Children, the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) was obliged to submit data on children in Latvia annually to the National Centre for the Protection of the Rights of the Child. The first compilation of data specifically on children had been published in 2000 and distributed to local government, children's rights organizations and other partners.

14. The main task of the custody courts was to protect children's rights by intervening, together with police and social services, in conflicts with parents where a child was in danger; protecting children's property from misuse by parents or guardians and safeguarding their well-being in cases of abuse by finding alternative care. They also monitored children in institutional care. Custody court decisions could be appealed by the child either to the court itself or to the district court.

15. Custody courts existed in every municipality. Members of the court were always fully qualified to deal with children's issues; they always numbered at least three, but the actual number was decided by each local authority having regard to the number of inhabitants in the area.

16. In reply to a question on the accessibility of the National Centre for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, she said that a joint campaign had been carried out with UNICEF to provide every child over the age of 12 with a card explaining how to contact the Centre. Special callback arrangements existed for children who did not wish to phone the Centre from their own homes, for example.

17. Booklets on how children could avoid dangerous situations had been published in Latvian and Russian. Teachers were encouraged to avoid using violence in school and to recognize possible cases of abuse. Schools were provided with a free manual giving relevant phone numbers and addresses. Specialists were sent out on request to address schools or school councils, even if an institution did not have the funds to pay for that service.

18. With regard to children's right to be heard, she said that every child over seven years of age involved in a parent-child or parent-parent conflict must be heard by the custody court; in adoption cases, children were consulted from the age of 7 and must give written consent from the age of 12; in cases of change of citizenship, children over the age of 14 must give written consent. In institutional terms, student councils existed in schools and cultural institutions, and the Ministry of Education and Science had concluded an agreement with the Latvian Youth Council, the Latvian School Students' Council and the Latvian Students' Council obliging the Ministry to discuss and provide information on issues regarding schoolchildren and youth organizations.

19. The Centre had received more than 2,000 complaints in 2000, including in particular from children whose families were threatened with eviction. In such cases, the Centre established a dialogue with the local authority, the custody court and social services in order to resolve the problem. The administrative procedures required children's interests to be taken into account.

20. On the subject of assistance to children in economic difficulties, she said that one aim of the Ministry of Education and Science campaign "School is waiting for you" conducted in 1997-1998, had been to provide assistance through local authorities and NGOs for families who lacked resources for school books, etc.

21. Latvia was one of the few countries with legislation prohibiting corporal punishment. It promoted child-friendly educational methods and tried in various ways to promote parents' awareness of the issue. Social workers who realized that parents were using corporal punishment were obliged to work with them to help them stop doing so.

22. Penalties for the sale of alcohol to minors ranged from a fine of about US$ 100 to withdrawal of the licence to sell alcohol.

23. Children's right to privacy was enshrined in law. If the police, for example, acting on information received or because they suspected the child was in danger, entered a child's room without the child's or guardian's permission, they were obliged to report that fact to the prosecutor's office within 24 hours.

24. Ms. ČABE (Latvia) said that, in Latvia, it was obligatory to register births within one month and there was no charge. If the parents were dead or unable to register the birth for any other reason, it should be registered by the maternity nurse, the doctor or any other person who had participated in the birth. According to instructions from the Ministry of Welfare, if a child was born in a state, municipal or private hospital, it was the duty of the manager of the institution to register the birth on a special form. If no one registered a birth and the municipality had information about it, it was required to provide that information in writing to the registry office. Therefore, nearly all births were registered.

25. Mr. DOEK, referring to the issue of juvenile justice, said that there appeared to be four correctional institutions for boys and one for girls. He would be interested to know whether all the facilities had permanent staff, who were in contact with the inmates every day, whether social rehabilitation was attempted, and to whom inmates could make known any complaints. The most common problem appeared to be the extensive time taken for pre-trial investigations which in principle should not exceed two months, but in practice went on longer for different reasons, such as the courts' heavy workload.

26. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ, referring to family environment and alternative care, asked why the number of children in institutional care had risen from 3,289 to 3,637 between 1997 and 1999. It would also be interesting to know whether the custody courts or any other institution provided support to families undergoing difficult situations with their children.

27. The meaning of the term "boarding schools" required clarification, since it appeared to refer to schools for poor children and there had been an increase in pupils attending such schools; it was unclear whether that was good or bad. She asked whether the custody courts were involved in the decision to send a child to boarding school and whether it involved a merely temporary separation from parents.

28. With regard to education in general, there had been a census in Latvia in 2000, and it would be interesting to know whether the results had shown an increase in population and whether there were currently more children under 18 years of age, or fewer. School attendance was 82.7 per cent for the year 1999-2000, which was lower than the figure for the previous year; did that mean that 20 per cent of children did not attend school at all? The written replies mentioned that 9,572 students had been excluded in 1999-2000; however, it was unclear on what grounds children were excluded and why the number was so high. It would be useful to know whether Latvia had conducted research on non-attendance to see whether it was higher in rural, urban or minority areas.

29. Mr. DOEK, referring to article 18 of the Convention, said that the Committee would welcome information on social services for families in need. According to the report a system existed but allowances covered only a small proportion of needs, especially in the case of single mothers with several children.

30. Some children were ending up in institutions or on the street. The numbers of street children varied according to the source, but it would be useful to know whether specific programmes had been established for them and whether the problem existed only in Riga or elsewhere too. Children were in institutions, and also in foster care or adopted. According to the delegation's written replies, the total number of children to whom guardianship was provided was 7,657 in 1998 and nearly 7,902 in 1999, which gave a total of over 15,000 children in two years. Additional information on what guardianship signified would be useful. Did the term "foster family" refer to children being taken in by the extended family or were some people paid to raise other people's children?

31. With regard to domestic adoption, he wished to know whether the Government had carried out activities to encourage Latvians not only to foster but also adopt Latvian children Pending the enactment of legislation on intercountry adoption, how were the courts dealing with the situation? There appeared to be a significant number of older children being adopted abroad, despite the increased difficulties of integrating older children into a new home and the greater possibility of abuse. Was the Government controlling the situation in any way?

32. There were no clear figures on sexual or any other type of abuse of children within the family. He would appreciate further information on the treatment of child victims, as there was a concern that the legal system was not child-friendly. It might be necessary to reform it to ensure that children were not subjected to repeated questioning by the different authorities.

33. There were instances of children being kept in pre-trial detention for up to two or three years, which was a gross violation of the rights of the child. Latvia should consider introducing a rule whereby any child kept in pre-trial detention for more than three months would automatically be freed.

34. Mr. FULCI said that according to an NGO, the Focal Point against Sexual Exploitation of Children, there were between 15,000 and 25,000 street children in Latvia. In 1998, the Latvian Parliament had enacted the Law on Protection of the Rights of Children but there was no specific implementation mechanism. He would welcome the delegation's comments on those figures and on how the law was being implemented.

35. With regard to basic health and welfare, the 1997 Medication Law stated that every doctor was responsible for preserving the life of an unborn child, if pregnancy was not harmful to either the mother or the child, and that doctors had the right to refuse to perform abortions if there were no medical reasons for doing so. However, the figures given for pregnancies of adolescents between 15 and 19 years of age, showed 47 per cent live births, 28 per cent legal abortions and 9 per cent miscarriages. He asked for additional information on the situation and how it might be remedied.

36. According to Radio Free Europe, a study by the Central Statistical Bureau showed that 90 per cent of adolescents between 15 and 16 years of age had consumed alcohol or taken drugs in 1999, 89 per cent of boys and 88 per cent of girls had consumed alcohol and 60 per cent of boys and 50 per cent of girls had become intoxicated at some time during the year. The use of marijuana among adolescents had tripled. He would be grateful for information on why there was such a high consumption of alcohol and drugs and what could be done about it.

37. A report of the United States Department of State said that prostitution was increasing in Riga, and there was evidence that the trafficking in women and children for prostitution abroad was growing. In May 1999, Parliament had amended the Penal Code to try to deal with that crime by increasing the penalties when minors were involved. The Committee would welcome further information on what action was being taken to stop the practice.

38. Ms. KARP asked what the process was for resolving student complaints regarding violence by teachers and whether teachers were suspended in such cases.

39. She understood that welfare allowances and services were still very dependent on the financial conditions of the local authority. How did Latvia reconcile that situation with the people's right to have allowances and ensure that it did not lead to discrimination against children?

40. Additional information would be useful on the custody courts, in particular whether they worked with the welfare authorities and the police and whether they referred people to conciliation or other measures outside the court.

41. There appeared to be difficulties with regard to the payment of maintenance for children who lived in Latvia by parents working in Russia; she asked whether that was due to the cost of transferring funds or to the length of time it took. What was being done to enforce payment of maintenance?

42. Regarding sexual abuse, it appeared that girls and boys were protected only until 16 years of age, because the age of consent was 16. She wondered whether Latvia had considered adopting the Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action against Commercial Exploitation of Children, which recommended that children should be protected until the age of 18. It was very important to tackle the growing problem of girls who were taken from Latvia to work as prostitutes in other countries. What measures did the Government take for girls who were expelled back to Latvia, where they were in danger of being the object of revenge from the organizations that had recruited them, particularly if they gave evidence against the latter? Had any programmes or agencies been established to provide support and rehabilitation for such girls?

43. It would be useful to know whether children could have free testing for AIDS, whether they could request it without parental permission and what action was taken if they tested positive.

44. There was a trend towards multidisciplinary projects for treating child victims of sexual abuse, where all the treatment was provided under one roof. Latvia should consider establishing such a project.

45. Ms. RILANTONO, referring to basic health and welfare, said that, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), Latvia had a negative population growth rate, which was surprising as the phenomenon was more usual in developed countries. There appeared to be high rates of infant and maternal mortality.

46. Information from WHO also indicated that abortion was the most common form of fertility regulation in Latvia and that there were approximately as many abortions as live births. For women under 20 and girls, 1,435 abortions had been recorded in 1997 per 1,000 live births. Was reproductive health taught in schools? How did the public health-care system cover the subject? There were reports of high levels of maternal mortality owing to haemorrhaging. Was prenatal care provided free of charge? Apparently, what was needed was a more holistic approach to prenatal and perinatal care and to teenage reproductive health services. What was the Government's position concerning the high rate of abortion, especially in the light of the country's negative population growth?

47. Ms. MOKHUANE expressed concern about discrimination in the naturalization process against persons who fared poorly in academic terms and would be likely to encounter difficulties in passing the language examinations that the process required.

48. According to WHO statistics, deficiencies of micronutrients such as iron and iodine were a serious problem which apparently could result in disorders including brain damage and could seriously impede children's mental development. In 1998, Latvia's mortality rate for children under five and infants had been the highest in the Baltic States. Had that rate declined? In 1998, breastfeeding rates had remained low. Had they since increased? The level of consumption of fruits and vegetables was the lowest in Europe. What was being done to improve nutrition? She asked how primary health care was financed, and whether such care was easily accessible to the general population. She would also like to know whether any studies had been conducted on resistance to condom usage and its effect on efforts to control sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS and syphilis. Latvia's suicide rate was the highest in Europe. What action had been taken to prevent suicidal behaviour? Had the Government taken any steps to discourage smoking and substance abuse by adolescents?

49. Paragraph 200 of the report stated that children could be placed in specialized schools free of charge. Currently, the trend in many countries was to integrate special-needs children into regular establishments. What was the situation in Latvia?

50. Mr. RABAH asked whether the figure of 133 minors in detention represented the cumulative total held in the course of the year or the number in captivity at a given time. He asked what kinds of offences such children had committed, and whether juvenile courts or judges existed. Were alternative measures provided by law for juvenile offenders? He would also like to know whether juvenile offenders received legal aid, whether they had access to social workers, and whether specific training was provided to specialists who worked with them.

51. Ms. KARP said that, according to a report from Save the Children, in Jurmala, some 3,000 eviction claims were currently before the courts, representing about 5 per cent of the town's population. To what extent had the best interests of the child been taken into consideration in the eviction proceedings? Adoptive parents and many other people caring for children were not entitled to family allowances. How were the best interests of the child taken into consideration in such circumstances? The report provided much information on education relating to article 28 of the Convention, but there was little on the aims enumerated in article 29. How were they reflected in the school curricula?

52. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ asked the size of the Roma community in Latvia and approximately how many children it included. The report mentioned that there were classes for Belarusian and Roma children. Were such classes held in the Roma language, and were there any teachers of Roma origin? What was the attendance rate of Roma children?

The meeting was suspended at 4.45 p.m. and resumed at 4.55 p.m.

53. Mr. VASILJEVSKIS (Latvia), replying to questions concerning education, said that the number of students per computer had dropped from 67 in 1999 to about 30 in 2001. All secondary schools and 60 per cent of primary schools had Internet access. The Cabinet of Ministers had adopted regulations under which all children subject to compulsory education must be registered by their municipalities.

54. In 2000, just over 3,000 children between the ages of 7 and 15 were not attending schools, for various reasons. The educational system provided for a wide-ranging curriculum, which included compulsory health education in grades five and nine. There were plans to institute compulsory health education in secondary schools as well, as from 2002. The Government also provided some 4 million lats in funding for extracurricula activities.

55. Education for children with special needs was provided at 17 boarding schools and 63 special schools. A cooperation project was currently under way with the Nordic countries, the aim of which was to integrate children with special needs into regular schools whenever possible. The boarding schools, which were free of charge, were attended by orphans and children from families with incomes under a specified minimum. The Government had issued a special textbook for the teaching of the Roma language. There were currently six classes in which Roma pupils were provided with basic education. Minority students had the same rights as others, and in addition were entitled to learn their mother tongue and to maintain their cultural heritage.

56. Mr. KĀRKLIŅŠ (Latvia) said that the figure of 82.7 per cent represented the proportion of students enrolled in primary school as a percentage of all students, including those in secondary school. The number of children not enrolled in compulsory primary education for various reasons was about 3,000, and the number attending primary school was 361,432.

57. Ms. ČABE (Latvia) said that a law on sexual and reproductive health had been adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers in 2000 and was currently in its second reading before Parliament. Final adoption was expected in 2001. The Government was also developing a strategy of mother and child health care, which would include sections on reproductive and children's health promotion and disease prevention, including more effective information activities. The strategy was currently being discussed in the Cabinet of Ministers and was expected to be adopted by the end of January 2001.

58. Pregnant women were monitored by gynaecologists and family doctors. Outpatient consultations were also provided at the country's four perinatal centres. Since 1995 there had been an average of eight deaths of pregnant women per year, and the maternal mortality rate

in 1999 had been 41.5 per 100,000 live births. While the birth rate was decreasing, the maternal mortality rate was rising. The majority of maternal mortality cases could have been prevented with timely diagnosis and treatment of pathologies.

59. The primary health-care system in Latvia was still developing, and was modelled after the Canadian system, with an emphasis on the role played by family physicians. About 87 per cent of the population had been registered with a family physician in 1999. Care for pregnant and postpartum women was provided by 455 gynaecologists, 81 midwife doctors' assistants and 539 midwives. At the end of 1999 nearly 600 hospital beds had been assigned to their care. The reproductive health-care system was grappling with serious problems in respect of abortion, maternal mortality and perinatal care. With the development of a new strategy for mother and child health, however, that situation should improve.

60. Infant mortality had decreased from over 400 cases in 1995 to just over 200 in 1999. Access to emergency health-care services was available to everyone free of charge. State-provided medical services were accessible to citizens of Latvia, permanent residents and residents of other countries who held residency permits, as well as citizens of States which had concluded international agreements with Latvia providing for such care. Such patients paid for a portion of their care under a copayment system. Exceptions were made and no fees were charged for certain groups such as children under one year of age, disabled children, residents of children's homes and boarding schools and members of foster families and orphanages. In cases where fees were due for children, they were charged at a reduced rate. The funding system for health-care services was currently being revised, and one of the proposed changes would eliminate payments for children's medical services altogether.

61. Under a draft law on psychiatric care which had recently been drawn up in conformity with international regulations and practices in that field, children could be hospitalized only with the consent of their parents and on the advice of a psychiatrist. Parents of children up to the age of 10 were entitled to stay at the hospital with their children free of charge. The bill was currently before the Cabinet of Ministers and would probably come before Parliament some time in 2001.

62. The vaccination rate for infectious diseases among children was 95 per cent. In some regions, where the risk of encephalitis was particularly high, vaccinations against the disease were provided free of charge. In general, the vaccination situation had improved since 1998.

63. Only every third infant under the age of six months was breastfed, which indicated that education for mothers-to-be was insufficient. Since 1998, a National Breastfeeding Committee had been operating in conjunction with the Ministry of Welfare and UNICEF. A regional hospital in Valmira had been designated a "baby-friendly" hospital, and other similar initiatives would be developed in the future. Her Government was aware that there were problems concerning reproductive and women's health in general, but it was working to correct that situation, and would continue to accord it priority over the coming years. Documents had been drafted for the attention of Parliament and a monitoring system for pregnant women had been established.

64. Replying to a question concerning child abuse, she said that children could go directly to a custody court or to see a doctor without needing to inform their parents. Doctors had a duty to inform the custody courts when they were contacted directly, and the custody courts were responsible for deciding whether or not to contact the parents concerned.

65. The Government's mother and child health-care strategy was designed to implement contraception programmes for women and girls under the age of 18. Though abortion was legal in Latvia pursuant to the Reproductive and Sexual Health Act, under the Medication Law doctors had a duty to attempt to persuade mothers not to terminate a pregnancy if there were no medical grounds for doing so. It was their right to refuse to perform an abortion in such circumstances. Recourse to abortion was often the result of poor education. In order to address that problem, the Ministry of Welfare had published a series of booklets on contraception, available in every hospital in the country. One of the tasks of the Family Centre of Latvia was to educate patients and doctors, including specialists and general practitioners, in effective methods of contraception.

66. AIDS tests were provided free of charge throughout Latvia, and Ministry of Welfare advice booklets on the virus were available in all schools and hospitals. There were an increasing number of AIDS victims, often infected as a result of intravenous drug use, including nine cases in children since 1998.

67. Ms. PODZIŅA (Latvia), referring to institutional and alternative care, said that the custody courts had the power to remove children from their biological parents when their health was endangered as a result of economic difficulties or negligence. Children taken into care were traditionally placed in institutions. There were currently 6 orphanages, catering for babies under the age of 2, 3 special-needs institutions and 56 shelters for children aged between 2 and 18. There were currently 450 children in care institutions legally available for adoption. The State was also trying to stimulate the development of alternative care. Appointed guardians were entitled to State benefits and four months' leave to fulfil their responsibilities. Specially-trained foster families, of which there were currently 17, constituted a new form of care structure, and were also entitled to benefits from central and local Government. Guardians and adoptive parents had the same rights as biological parents.

68. Ms. IELĪTE (Latvia) said that although custody courts had the right to remove children from families, either on a temporary or permanent basis, as a general policy they tried to keep children with their biological parents whenever possible. In three cases in the previous year, a legal decision to remove a child from his parents had been overturned to keep families together. In addition, from January 2001 local government authorities would be legally obliged to draft individual support programmes for each family from which children were removed with a view to their eventual return.

69. Street children were divided into two categories: those who lived and slept on the streets, and those who usually went back home to their families or guardians in the evening. Research had shown that most of those children were boys aged between 9 and 15, and came from single-parent families with a number of children to look after. Since 1997, a network of NGOs had been operating to provide a range of services to street children, and NGOs had subsequently

received a number of grants for their work in that area. In 1999, the National Centre for the Rights of the Child and an NGO named Education for a Civic Society had run a training course for local government social workers dealing with street children.

70. There was a difference between the allowances received by adoptive parents and those for the benefit of foster parents or guardians. Unfortunately, while custody courts had the right to monitor the progress of adopted children within Latvia, that was not the case abroad. Nevertheless, efforts had been made to send representatives of the courts or of the Ministry of Justice to families outside Latvia whenever possible.

71. With regard to sexual abuse, the State had stepped up its activities and budgetary commitment in the previous two years. It had worked in conjunction with NGOs to develop a national action plan with a view to implementing the recommendations of the Stockholm Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. A recent case of child prostitution involving two girls aged 15 and 17 had led to the State adopting a procedure for protecting and providing rehabilitation for the girls concerned. A decision had been taken at the ministerial level to establish a specific rehabilitation centre for children involved in prostitution. A meeting organized by the National Centre for the Protection of the Rights of the Child in 1999 had led to the establishment of a telephone hotline for reporting Internet sites containing material of an explicit nature likely to be harmful to children.

72. Mr. JANSONS (Latvia), replying to questions by Mr. Doek and Ms. Karp, said that his Government was aware of the problem of long periods of pre-trial detention. The main prerequisite for dealing with the problem was to increase the capacity of the court system, and many improvements had already been made, including the building of new premises and an increase in judges' salaries. Cases were being examined with increasing speed, although further action was required. In March 2000, the Ministry of Justice had issued a written instruction urging courts to give priority to cases involving children awaiting trial. The Code of Criminal Procedure also provided for measures other than detention, including personal guarantee, transfer under police supervision, bail and corrective education.

73. Replying to questions by Mr. Rabah, he said that a new Criminal Court had been established in April 1999, and that the age of criminal responsibility was 14 for all offences. New penalties applying to minors included warnings, detention in custody, compulsory labour, and fines in cases involving minors with their own income. Statistics from 1998 showed that almost 20 per cent of officially registered crimes were committed by minors, and that in the course of that year, a total of 1,678 minors had received some form of punishment. Of those, 275 had been given sentences involving deprivation of liberty, of an average length of one to three years. There were separate educational and correctional facilities for boys and girls, operational since 1996 and 1998 respectively. In accordance with the Code of Criminal Procedure, all cases involving minors required the presence of a solicitor. With regard to detention facilities, a board consisting of representatives of the Ministry of Justice and Office of the Prosecutor-General was responsible for monitoring conditions.

74. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ said that she hoped the comprehensive dialogue would have a positive effect on implementation of the Convention in Latvian legislation. The coordination of activities carried out by the Children's Rights Protection Centre was very

encouraging. Nevertheless, a special monitoring structure should be established, such as an Ombudsman, since the Government was bound to find it difficult to monitor its own legislation. It was essential to allocate sufficient resources for the building of a child-friendly society, and economic analysis showed that money spent with that in mind would in the long term result in considerable savings for the Government. Cooperation between the Government of Latvia and civil society was generally very productive, but a more systematic approach to include children's associations would be even more fruitful. She welcomed the implementation of a rights-based approach, but reiterated the importance of choosing priorities. Education should certainly be one of those, as should the allocation of resources. Lastly, she said that the Committee was aware of the transition taking place in the Latvian economy, and of the difficulties that implied.

75. Mr. KĀRKLIŅŠ (Latvia) said that he looked forward to receiving the Committee's objective recommendations, particularly since his country was in the process of drafting its second periodic report, which would be submitted during the first quarter of 2001.

76. The CHAIRPERSON said that when it came to reflect on the Committee's conclusions, the Latvian Government should take note of article 44, paragraph 6 of the Convention, concerning the dissemination of information regarding periodic reports to the public. She also noted that Latvia had yet to accept the amendment to article 43 of the Convention increasing the Committee's size, and urged the delegation to remind its Government of the need to do so as quickly as possible.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.